

**Statement of Ranking Member Robert C. “Bobby” Scott
House Education and the Workforce Committee Hearing
Serving Students and Families through Child Nutrition Programs
Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 10:00 a.m.
Rayburn 2175**

Good morning and thank you, Chairman Kline, for holding this hearing today. I look forward to examining the continuum of federal child nutrition programs, which are lifelines for the approximately 40 million children who rely on them every day for healthy food.

I would like to extend my thanks to all of the witnesses, but I must extend a special welcome to the First Lady of my home state of Virginia – Dorothy McAuliffe. Mrs. McAuliffe has been focusing not only on ending childhood hunger, but also on improving access to Virginia's fresh and locally grown agricultural commodities. This dual goal helps children, supports our farmers and strengthens our local economies.

More than 60 years ago, through enactment of the first federal child nutrition program -- the National School Lunch Act of 1946 -- Congress recognized that feeding hungry children was not just a moral imperative but also an imperative for the health and security of our nation.

Today, a majority of American public school students (51 percent) are eligible for free and reduced price lunches. According to the latest USDA data, 15.8 million, or 21.6 percent, of children live in households facing a constant struggle against hunger. The rates are nearly double for African American children at 39 percent and significantly higher for Hispanic children at 29.5 percent. In my state of Virginia, 16.2 percent of children are food insecure.

The continuum of federal child nutrition programs and policies that we will be discussing today are vital to the long-term success of our nation's children and, through them, our nation itself.

From WIC's prenatal programs, to school and summer meals, and child care food programs, participation in these programs has resulted in positive health outcomes for low-income children and a 4 to 1 return on investment.

Hunger is linked to lower student achievement and poorer behavioral outcomes. These programs are powerful tools in providing greater economic opportunities for at-risk youth, and helping them break free of the tragic cycle of poverty.

While access to food is vitally important, equally important is access to nutritious, high-quality food. About 30 million children rely on the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs. Students consume up to half of their daily calories while at school. For many children, school based meals are their primary source of nutrition.

Foods that are too high in fat and sugar have been linked to weaker educational and behavioral outcomes. They also lead to childhood obesity and long term health consequences as adults, including heart disease, hypertension and diabetes.

Approximately 10 percent of our nation's healthcare spending goes toward treating conditions related to obesity and unhealthy weight.

To address these challenges, in 2010, Congress enacted the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act. In addition to expanding access to child nutrition programs, the law also updated and improved the nutritional standards of the foods served to our children—standards that had not been revised in over 15 years. Most importantly, the new standards are based on scientific evidence, not politics or fiscal bottom lines. They include weekly limits on calories, sugar, fat and sodium, require fruits and vegetables at every meal and incorporate whole grains.

These changes are not promoting an exotic diet fad. They conform to the healthy eating habits most of us in this room try to follow each day. And, the vast majority of school districts – 93 percent – across the country are successfully implementing the new healthy meals standards today, with students eating more fruit and vegetables not just at school, but outside of school too.

As we focus on healthier food for children, we cannot ignore that child nutrition is also a national security issue. According to Mission Readiness, a group of retired officers who support the new healthy meals standards, 25 percent of young Americans are too overweight to enlist in our nation's military.

I am pleased that today we will have an opportunity to discuss the scope and impact of federal child nutrition programs and hopefully, ways to improve and strengthen them. As we move through this process, we must keep in mind the overarching goal of these nutrition programs: to provide children with healthy foods that can support them as they learn and grow, which in turn supports our national interests and long-term economic prosperity.

I again thank everyone for being here this morning. With that, I yield back to the Chairman.

